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performancePC

CANADA'S NEXT GENERATION COMPUTER LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

- *Early Christmas Shopping List*
- *Advanced Portable Storage Devices*
- *Aria Digital Music Juke Box MS270*



The image features a variety of Apple products arranged on a red and yellow background. In the center is a white Apple G5 iMac with a large screen displaying a photo of two children. To its left is a smaller monitor showing a landscape. Above the iMac is a printer and a scanner. Below the iMac is a white keyboard and a mouse. In the bottom left corner is a Siemens C65 cellular phone. Three white arrows point downwards from the top left towards the iMac.

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November - The Month Before Christmas

By Joshua Paul



Chances are if you are reading Performance PC, you are thinking about your next computer related purchase. I am unabashedly obsessed with buying computer stuff. I am always thinking about what I need to get next - for my home, for the publishing business, for the managed server hosting business, and for the software development

business. I am always looking for products that will improve the quality of our lives. Specifically I want a replacement for my Danger Hiptop (<http://www.danger.com/>) that I can do web application development on. The Hiptop is a great replacement for my old Palm M500 and cell phone - but I can't use it to build anything. I can use it to take pictures and for creative writing - but I like to do dynamic writing - writing that lives - interactive writing - aka programming.

There are several different ways I have been able to think that I could use to do this: 1) a Linux PDA like the Sharp Zaurus, 2) a Pocket PC, 3) an ultra light notebook, 4) a wearable computer, 5) write pseudo code on paper. It is easy to get distracted by the specifications of the technology - capacity, speed, performance - these are all important - however in the long term, selecting a computer that "does no harm" maybe more important.

Sometimes a new technology will be upgrading something I already have, and sometimes it will be something completely new. With new technology I have to consider what potential "harm" may come from using it to live with me. I have to ask myself - what potential catastrophic chain of events could unfold because of this decision. To make a decision, information is required - and spending a few hours on the internet Googling could save you days of frustration. Almost any computer product you are interested in buying has been reviewed and documented on the internet - and you can read about any potential issues associated to the product.

The things I am looking for in a product are:

- **Support:** Can I get vendor support? Is there a support community built up around the product?
- **Lifespan:** Is this product going to be around 2 or 3 years from now? Are enough people using it? How long can I get support and accessories?
- **Development Environment:** Is the product Open Source or industry standards-based or is it proprietary? This is somewhat related to Lifespan.
- **Price:** Are the features and functions provided by the device reasonable when compared to other similar products? For example, an ultra light notebook is more expensive than a regular notebook - but is the premium

for the ultra light worthwhile?

In the process of evaluating a potential purchase, I look initially for a deal breaker before going into further detail.

- 1) Sharp Zaurus - internet rumors indicate Sharp is leaving the North American market - suggesting that support and lifespan may be limited.
- 2) Pocket PC: I couldn't find any resources for programming PHP and MySQL on these units. There are programming languages specific to the units, but they weren't the languages that I want. No support, no purchase.
- 3) Ultra light notebook - There is a nice sub notebook from Fujitsu the size of a VHS tape. Unfortunately, it only comes with with a Transmeta 700MHz processor - probably too slow - at \$1600 CAD. Price combined with the lack of a cell phone make this a deal breaker for me.
- 4) Wearable computer - I could only find a single company - and they still seem to be prohibitively expensive.
- 5) Pen and paper - Cheap and readily available, no deal breakers here.

So in the end I will have to stick with "pretending" to code - and just use pen and paper to prepare for when I am in front of a computer. ☺

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We would like to thank all of you who entered the Back to School Contest. Response was overwhelming! Thank you all! And an especially big thank you to our generous sponsors who contributed such a great goodies bag of treats! Stay tuned to PerformancePC for more great contests!



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Contributor	Prize	Retail Value	Winner
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Half Price Books	DVD Confidential: Hundreds of Hidden Easter Eggs Revealed	\$ 72.95	July
	Digital Video Essential	\$ 40.95	July
	Tricks of the Windows Game Programming Game 2nd Edition	\$ 32.99	John
Mac Station	iPod Mini	\$360.00	Johnny
Mustard	Thermomix SIZEM TOSER	\$499.99	Brandy
Jehovah Electronics	CCTV Security 8/1W Camera w/Crystal Lens	\$ 96.00	Mike
Kareem	AC-SPC4022 Two Way Remote	\$199.00	Mario
PerformancePC	HP LAN/USB Network Ultra G Socketed Dual DDR SDRAM Serial TOULAN 1034	\$200.00	

TOTAL: \$1238.78

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Samsung Develops World's First Five-Megapixel Camera Phone

South Korea's Samsung Electronics has developed the world's first mobile phone equipped with a five-megapixel camera. The latest model, called the SCH-S230, has a charge-coupled device camera and high-sensitivity flash which allows users to take high-quality pictures. It can also function as a camcorder. (sknews.yahoo.com)



Sony Announces High Definition 1080i HDR-FX1; First 3 CCD HDV Camcorder

The HDR-FX1 includes three 1/3-inch 16.9 1.12 Megapixel green CCDs. Each CCD measures 960 x 1080 pixels. The inclusion of three large

CCDs is a major difference between the Sony and JVC's first entry - and will likely allow the HDR-FX1 to be taken very seriously by the industry. (camcorderinfo.com)



Apple Hopes to Top Gadget Charts with U2 iPod Player

The news on Tuesday that Apple will release a U2 version of its iPod - a bold black-and-red device loaded with digital copies of hundreds of new and old U2 tunes - along with an iPod photo edition was enough for some of Apple's most bullish analysts to raise estimates yesterday morning for the Cupertino, California-based firm. (theglobeandmail.com)



iPod Photo

www.apple.com/ipodphoto/

The newest member of the iPod family, iPod Photo comes in two sizes, a 4GB model, available for \$499, and a spacious 8GB model that sells for \$599. Both feature a razor sharp LCD display that lets you see your photos in vivid color - 65,536 colors, to be exact. And with its built-in backlighting, you'll be able to admire these photos indoors or out.

First Suit Against Internet "Spy Ware"

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission on Thursday asked a federal court to shut down an operation that it said disables users' computers in an attempt to bully them into buying anti-spy ware products. Internet users unwittingly downloaded the software when they visit Web sites that contain certain banner ads, the FTC said. The

software exploits a hole in Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer Web browser to work its way onto computers without users' knowledge, according to the lawsuit. A Washington consumer group, the Center for Democracy and Technology, had demonstrated the software to Reuters before it filed a complaint with the FTC in February. The software hijacks Web browsers, causes CD-ROM trays to mysteriously slide open and slows down computers or causes them to cease working altogether. A torrent of "pop up" messages urges consumers to buy programs called Spy Wiper or Spy Deleter to clean up the mess. ■



Apple's G5 iMac: Wonderful in White

By Alan Siemon

Even with a share of computer sales somewhere south of 5%, Apple manages to dominate the imaginations of the public—at least of that part of the public that writes about technology. The January 2002 release of the company's G4 iMac, for instance, got Apple CEO Steve Jobs on the cover of *Time* Magazine.

Along with Jobs' influence, the original 1998 iMac, a bulbous colourful one-piece G3-powered computer, arguably saved the company from financial ruin and led to herds of translucent plastic games and gadgets, everything from pens to phones trying to catch on to the iMac look and appeal. The G4 iMac replaced the original fruity colours with a stark white, and featured an LCD panel anchored by an exquisitely engineered arm to a distinctive semi-spherical base.

Not everyone loved the new look, however, with critics comparing it to an overgrown high-end desk lamp. And while initially strong, G4 iMac sales quickly leveled off.



Released this September, the new iMacs remain white one-piece, LCD-display computers, now built around Apple's new high-end G5 processor. The half-a-volleyball base of the previous models is gone; all the computer's guts are within the LCD screen's 4 cm thick housing. Also gone is the flexible arm; the screen on this model tilts at different angles, but no longer moves forward, back or side-to-side. The



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iMac G5



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iPod U2 Special Edition

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resulting look is subtler than the earlier models: a clean, somewhat understated look that should fit in easily on desktops in homes and offices. With the 20" model weighing in at about 10 kg (25.2 lbs.—about 15 lbs. lighter than the 20" G4 model), it can be relatively easily moved about.

While Apple is not the first to offer computers built into LCD displays, most similar designs have an awkward bulge hanging off the back of the flat-panel display. Apple puts all the connectors on the back, the power cord in the center, the other ports in a row along the side. There's a hole in the arm to keep cables neatly organized.

Apple's ads make it look like the system can be run virtually cable free, the power cord is invisible from the front. If you like the wireless look, Apple sells a Bluetooth wireless keyboard and mouse (\$139), but they are not included in the basic package, nor is the (\$70) Bluetooth adapter needed to make them work. If you want Bluetooth, order it at the time of purchase; the internal Bluetooth adapter requires a different "mid-plane" and isn't user-installable afterwards. (Alternatively, you can use a USB Bluetooth module, but then you've got a dangling wire). Like other current Mac models, the iMac can use Apple's Airport Extreme 802.11g wireless networking adapter and includes an antenna for it, like the Bluetooth adapter, the Airport adapter (\$109) isn't part of the base package. Unlike the Bluetooth adapter it's easily added later: (Apple recently started to include Airport Extreme adapters in the base package for their iBook consumer notebooks; I hope this will be the case for the iMac as well.)

Apple includes its standard (wired) USB white extended keyboard and transparent optical mouse. Mac software supports multiple mouse buttons; fans of multiple buttons can plug in most popular PC (USB) mice and get support for

right-buttons, scroll wheels, and the like. (Alternatively, users of single-button Apple mice can access pop-up context menus by holding the Control-key while clicking). The Apple mouse is an especially slick device whose entire body can be clicked, but it would be nice if the company offered a two-button mouse option.

In a tidy row along the back of the G5, users will find an audio-in port and an audio-out port that can be used for standard headphones or speakers or for an optical cable to connect to high-end audio gear with S/PDIF inputs (allowing for 5.1-channel audio output). A video-out port requires an adapter to connect to VGA or video displays. There are three USB 2.0 ports, a pair of Firewire-400 ports, a 10/100 Ethernet port, and a modem port.

While the earlier iMacs required external speakers the new model has 12-watt speakers built into the bottom of the display; these lack bass response but otherwise produce pretty good sound. Also at the bottom are air intakes, the G5 processor runs hotter than its predecessor so the new iMac has multiple cooling fans. The cooling system is well designed with each fan running only as needed. Overall, the G5 iMac runs quietly, I never noticed a over the ongoing hum of the desktop PC sitting across the room in my office.

Another nice design touch: when not in use, the keyboard can be stowed nicely under the display panel to take up minimal desktop space. Alternatively, you can do away with the base entirely, mounting the whole thing directly on a wall.

Apple is selling the G5 iMac in three configurations: CD831799 gets you an iMac with a 17" widescreen LCD screen, a 1.6 GHz G5 processor, an 80 GB serial ATA hard

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Review Of Advanced Portable Storage Devices

the X's-Drive Pro V-300 and the MediaGear Flash HD to go

By Joshua Paul



What's the oldest magnetic media storage device you can remember? Have you ever seen an 8" floppy disk or a 5.25" disk? Or a 5MB hard drive? These days portable storage has taken many forms - there are new versions of the old forms - portable hard drives, and you could make a case that CD-R and CD-RWs have replaced the function to a large extent of floppy disks. But there has been an explosion of new portable macro storage devices - there are 9 different very small formats - that all have more capacity than the early magnetic media. These new formats are all flash memory devices - with the exception of the IBM Hitachi micro drive.

Flash media cards.

Compact Flash format

1 Type I (CF)

2 Type II (CF)

3 MicroDrive

Memory Stick Size

4 Memory Stick (MS)

5 Memory Stick Pro

6 Secure Digital (SD)

7 MultiMediaCard (MMC)

SmartMedia

8 SmartMedia (SM)

9 xD Picture Card (xD)

The main uses of these flash memory storage devices is for capturing digital images from digital cameras and digital video cameras (check out <http://www.fishers.com/> for the FVD-C1 which does both) - and these devices feature removable media - so you can use these cards like floppy disks. However, the majority of portable MP3 players use built in flash memory and not one of the above flash media cards - however the Lynx line

from RCA uses MMC - or the Pogo! Rip Flash uses both. (http://www.pogoproducts.com/ripflash_dlc.html)

The problem with all these formats is that they are as expensive as they are small, and the higher the capacity the exponentially more expensive.

That's the problem the X's-Drive Pro and the MediaGear products are designed to solve. They let you transfer your digital files off your expensive flash memory cards and on to a less expensive hard drive. Both products are advanced 2.5" hard drive cases with batteries, LCD screens, slots to read all the above formats, and a USB cable to connect the hard drive to your computer. You can buy these models without hard drives, or with 30GB, 40GB or 60GB hard drives.

The main reason you want one of these units is you want a simple system for getting data off your flash memory cards when you are away from your computer. Perhaps you are on vacation for a week and don't want to take your laptop or perhaps you don't have a laptop - and you want to take as many pictures as possible. Buying additional flash media cards is going to be several times more expensive than these units. For example, 1GB Compact Flash memory card is \$150 - the 30GB MediaGear product is \$240 - well worth the extra \$90.

Another reason to use the units is that they are the ultimate photo album - so if you are traveling to grandma's house on the other side of the world you don't want to burn dozens of CDs or DVDs - you just take your portable hard drive. Also, if you have recently upgraded your laptop's hard drive, you have the old one you need to do

something useful with - stick it in one of these boxes.

By building the different card readers in to the boxes they are compatible with any camera you or your friends have now and any camera you are going to buy in the future.

But what about your technologically challenged spouse? Is he or she going to be able to use it? Of the two units the MediaGear's case design and user interface put it ahead of the X's-Drive Pro unit. Powered off side by side, my wife immediately picked up the MediaGear unit and figured out how to turn it on - it only has 3 buttons - power - copy and select. However, the X's-Drive is initially more difficult - it has the ability to play MP3s as well. Is this feature worth an extra \$80 to you?

Conclusion, if you take alot of pictures and are planning a vacation and want to save money instead of buying more memory cards - these products are for you. If you want the smallest and simplest to use unit the MediaGear is for you. However, if you'd like to add MP3 playing functionality consider the X's Drive Pro.

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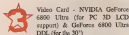
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Shopping List



Siemens CF62

By Babak Khomari

At first impression, I thought Fido had sent me one of the demo look-a-like phones by accident. It looked and felt more like a toy phone than a real phone. Once I discovered that it was a real phone, I took a liking to it immediately. At only 85 grams, it is one of the lightest phones that I have come across. It has no crazy standard

Specs

Network	GSM 900 / GSM 1800 / GPRS
Dimensions	114 x 44 x 16 mm, 26.5g
Weight	26
Type	LITHIUM ION
Size	104 x 110 pixels
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second external monochrome display (also illuminated) - 4-way navigation - Screen savers
Ring tones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 40 phone ringtones
Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 16 pictures - Download games, applications, melodies - Build-in flash file - Optional digital camera
Call records	30 dialed, 30 received, 20 missed calls
Data speed	12 - 48 kbps
Messaging	SMS, MMS, MMS
Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 16 - Java - WAP 1.2.1 - TV - Calculator - Currency converter



features, like built-in camera, video or MP3 player. It's simply a good old-fashioned phone. Sometimes that's all you really need. At the same time that I was reviewing this phone, I was reviewing two other phones. In the evenings when I left to go out, I found myself reaching for the CP62 rather than the other phones, just because it's so light, I could just put it in my pocket and never felt it's presence.

Display

The CP62 has two display screens: one on the outside used when the shell is closed, and the other, 43K screen, 130 by 130. The screen may seem small, with only a few lines of text showing compared to most other phones, but you have to remember that this is just a simple phone. You can alter the illumination and contrast by adjusting the backlight to fit your viewing needs. There is also the option to change font size to get more text on the screen, as well as support for color schemes to change the background menu colors. You can see who is calling you, if you have missed calls, or missed messages on the outer display.

Keypad

I liked the flat keypad. I had no problems pressing the wrong button even though the keys are close together. There is a click that follows every key pressed so you know if you have actually clicked on the button or not. The yellow backlit keys help low light situations.

Dynamic Lights

The dynamic lights on the CP62 are seven LEDs placed around the keypad. The LEDs can do either orange or amber colors, and you can define patterns for the lights. You can set them to go on when someone calls, for incoming calls and

missed calls, or when you open or close the clamshell. The predefined patterns are pretty cool and eye catching, especially in low light.

Phone

The CP62 is a tri-band phone, so you can use it anywhere in the world. The reception is good and the sound quality clear. It is enabled with polyphonic ring tones, and equipped with JAVA, GPRS and WAP. The phone can easily be customized with downloaded sounds, images and applications from the Siemens Internet almost anywhere in the world. The phone provides a good 5 hours of talk time and more than 5 days of standby time.

Conclusions

I loved this phone. It is a nice simple phone and it does what it's supposed to do very well. First of all it is super light and compact. You hardly feel that you are carrying it on you. You can buy the CP62 through Fido (www.fido.ca) for \$125 without a contract and \$50 with. One thing that I did not like about this phone is that it does not have a standard ring tone. It comes with a few built in "songs", but if you work in a professional environment, a reggae tone does not really cut it. The only way around this is to go online and download ring tones.

Pros:

Simple, good reception, well priced, nice design, great battery life

Cons:

No infra red, no Bluetooth, does not come with standard ring tones, java applications are too slow, volume is too low (or is it me getting too old). ■

Apple iMac

Continued from page 12

drive, a 533 MHz frontside bus, and a combo CD-R/DVD-ROM slot-loading drive. An additional \$250 boosts this to a 1.8 GHz G5, a 600 MHz frontside bus, and a SuperDrive, Apple's code for a DVD burner. \$2499 bumps it to a large 20" widescreen display and a 160 GB hard drive. (Hard drives up to 250 GB can be ordered).

All models include 512 K L2 cache and an 8x AGP nVidia GeForce FX 5200 Ultra graphics chip with 64 MB DDR video memory, integrated onto the motherboard, it is not replaceable. As well, all models ship with 256 MB of RAM. This amount of memory is adequate to run the operating system (Mac OS X 10.3) and basic applications, but for anything more, users will find it highly desirable to upgrade. Apple or its dealers will happily sell you an iMac with more RAM installed at the time of purchase, Apple upgrade charges range from \$105 for 512 MB to a hefty

\$1575 for 2 GB.

Alternatively, it's fairly easy to install more RAM yourself later. This iMac uses widely available PC-style DDR PC3200 RAM.

This iMac can be easily opened up; lay it face down on top of a towel to avoid scratching the LCD panel. Loosen three screws along the bottom of the display—with Apple's typical attention to detail, these screws are hexed so they can't be lost—and the back of the case comes up. Inside, you'll find two memory slots as well as the socket for the Airport Extreme wireless card. The iMac can take up to 2 GB of RAM; it can use RAM of differing sizes but will have best performance with two identical pieces.

With the cover off, the hard drive can be upgraded or replaced and an Airport Express wireless card added, but that's about all that can be done inside the box. Max-fans

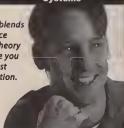
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iFido, Plug and Play Wireless High Speed Internet

By Babak Khosravi

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- Monthly transfer: up to 20 GB (download) and 5 GB (upload)
- Dynamic IP address

Behind the curtains:

Allstream has joined forces with Microcell Telecommunications (Fido) and NR Communications, to provide high-speed wireless Internet service in two markets: Richmond BC, and Cumberland, Ont. NR is providing the wireless equipment, Allstream brings cash and a backbone wireless network for wireless backhaul. Microcell, through its subsidiary Linklink, will provide the 2.50GHz licensed wireless spectrum to be used, plus its nationwide network of cellular towers. The resulting service has been dubbed iFido.

iFido

According to Fido, you can reach speeds of up to 2.2 Mbps, which is along the same speeds as Rogers/DSL services. At

the moment the modem is large (the size of a 300 page hard cover text book), but I'm sure that will change in later versions. The greatest advantage of this service is portability. You can take your high speed internet to other offices, to your friend's house, to your coffee shop with a power outlet, and you don't need to call any technicians to install another access point. One thing that I noticed during the iFido demo was that if there is an object too close to the modem, it could block the signal reception or strength. I did however get the demo in a mall, surrounded by heavy cement walls, and the reception was great.

At the moment, iFido is in its beta stage. That is why the modem and the service are so expensive. The modem costs \$325 dollars without agreement, or \$25 with agreement and the monthly usage is around \$40.

What I like about this is the fact that we as consumers have more choices. One or two companies offering services, controlling the prices, are not monopolizing the market. It's also an interesting concept, to have your internet with you wherever you go, rather looking for hot spots. For the moment, there is a maximum transfer up to 20GB download and 5 GB upload. I can see this system being very useful for people who need constant connection and access to high speed internet on the road within their GSM coverage.

Though I love the concept and the service, I already carry enough stuff with me throughout the day and as present my connection needs are limited and not affordably by my present supplier. ■

Apple GS iMac

Continued from page 18

wanting the ability to change video adapters or add PCI cards will have to purchase one of Apple's PowerMac towers.

With enough RAM, the GS iMac is a perky performer, performance is aided by the fast 8-ATA hard drive. Apple is among the first computer manufacturers to make this newer, better-performing standard available by default in some of its models. The unproved hard drive bandwidth is a big plus with applications like Virtual PC 7, finally, the virtualized Windows system runs in something like real-time.

There's a nice software bundle, along with the pre-installed Mac OS X 10.3, the iMac includes Apple's slide suite (iPhoto, iMovie, iMusic), iDVD (on systems with the SuperDrive), and iGather, AppleWorks light-duty Office suite, and QuickTime 2004. A 30 day-trial version of Microsoft Office 2004 is included. If moving from an older Mac, there's a handy Setup Assistant that will lead you through the steps to connect your older Mac in Firewire Disk Mode, letting it appear on the iMac as an external hard drive

and making it easy to transfer documents and settings to the new system.

Performance is good, easily outclassing the previous-generation G4 iMac on most tests and an order of magnitude more responsive than the G4 iBook I use for most day-to-day work. It's not Apple's current performance champ, however; for that, users will need to move to one of the company's dual-G5 PowerMac models.

It's not easy to precisely compare Macs and Windows PCs; all comparisons are limited and too-easily criticized. Similarly, this isn't the place for me to get into the age-old Windows vs Mac (or Windows vs Linux vs Mac) debate. Personally, I use both Windows and Mac on a day-to-day basis.

You can buy a useable Windows PC (or even a useable Mac like Apple's G4 iMac models) for a lot less, but if your budget can stretch to the iMac's \$1800-2500 range and you want a stylish, space-saving, easy to set up and use (and virus and spyware-free) computer, Apple's new GS iMacs are well worth a look—even if you're currently a Windows user. Just be sure to budget for more RAM. ■



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Age of Mythology Gold Edition Logistics War Game

By Joshua Paul

I isn't there anything new, I thought as I looked at the box for Age of Mythology Gold Edition? Did the world really need another game about collecting resources to build weapons for making war? Or a 2 CD re-release of an almost 2-year-old game?

And then after 15 minutes of installing all 1.5 Gbs of it, I watched the cinematic intro and I was spellbound by the beauty of the graphics and by the storytelling.

I was bored with the simple plots of build peasants, chop wood, collect gold and food, and then build weapons factories, but Age of Mythology is different. To the former tasks, you also need to collect the favour of the gods, which is done differently for each civilization. For example, the Norse civilization earns the gods' favour by killing.

The detail of the graphics is

captivating. It is amazing to watch the peasants cut down trees, and see the tree trunk shake and quaver with every stroke of the axe. Watching the peasants construct the buildings is also fascinating. The only aspect of the game left to the imagination is the killing of the people. This is still only represented by a thermometer that eventually runs out. Perhaps in future versions we will see the peoples' deaths depicted more accurately. There is a nice touch when one of your people is killed: their soul, represented by slanting lights, is transported to heaven.

So after I had built a temple, which is the weapons factory where you make mythological units, and I had collected enough of the 4 resources, food, wood, gold and the favour of the gods, I could build special weaponslike centaurs and Cyclops (or is cyclops as it bears, or cyclops as it bears?).

In one of the campaigns, the story, which is prefaced by beautiful cinematic cut scenes, was that I had to destroy a neighbouring city of pirates by killing all their soldiers (the units created by weapons factories), such as archers and swordsmen, and destroy their town centre.

All in all a very enjoyable game, and worth considering for Christmas for someone who likes this kind of logistics war game.

Cost: \$55

Pros: modest hardware requirements, 35 single campaigns, great value
Cons: add-on, isn't compatible with Mac OS X's virtual pc graphics card

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Burnout 3 Takedown (Xbox)

by Chris Chen

Developer: Criterion Games

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Rating: 4.5/5

How many times have you played your favorite racing game to frustration and decided to just go crazy and start crashing into anything and everything? It feels great, doesn't it? The latest edition of the Burnout series is all about crashing, smashing, and causing mayhem, then getting rewarded for it! Although Burnout has been a successful title in Europe, it has never caught on in North America. With EA's marketing power, Burnout 3 Takedown is poised to become a huge seller worldwide.

Features

The faster and crazier you drive, the better. You get rewarded for, not only destroying as many cars as possible, but doing it with style. Burnout 3 is an extremely fast racing game that offers 67 different vehicles, ranging from compact cars to 18-wheel semi-trucks.

The user interface is simple and logical. Navigating the menus can be a bit frustrating for experienced players because of the incessant button pressing to actually start playing. But beginners will appreciate the tutorials and tips offered when starting a new course.

You can either play alone, with friends via multiplayer mode, or online with up to six opponents on the Xbox Live network. A serious knock against online play is the inability to challenge European opponents because of differing

television standards. So much for racing the world (as the packaging states)!

There are several game modes including Race, Time Attack, Road Rage, and Crash. Each has its own objective, but you can be sure that crashing is always involved. As you race, you earn Boost that ultimately helps you wreak hard-hitting havoc. And when you crash your car, you enter a slow-motion mode, and control where and what your car crashes into. The better the crash, the better the final reward.

With each race, you earn money to unlock additional cars and tracks. Your profile is updated as you progress through the various courses and earn new cars and you can access your Driver Details to see your progression, watch training videos, and access a few extras in the game.

Graphics

Burnout developer Criterion Games has created the prettiest Takedown to date. The courses and environments are alive and vibrant with plenty of eye candy to be seen—including real advertising, such as Axx dodecahedron.

Despite no real vehicles, because manufacturers don't like licensing their cars for a game where they will be smashed and wrecked, the developers were forced to model their own original vehicles, which they did a solid job of.

When using Boost, the impression of speed is immediately relayed as the passing buildings or trees blur and you enter a state of warp-mode, making you want to grip your controller a little harder and hold on for dear life.

Audio

Revving engines and burning traffic as you blow by oncoming vehicles is dramatic but somewhat fake. However the 40+ songs in the soundtrack, by major recording artists—including Jimmy Eat World and the Ramones—keeps the racing interesting and really helps get the adrenaline pumping.

Conclusion

Burnout 3 is nothing like racing in Project Gotham or Gran Turismo, but it's easy to pickup and play at no time at all. Although it has a few annoying quirks, there is nothing about Burnout 3 that prevents gamers from having one heck of a fun ride. **B**



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NHL 2005 EA Sports

By Joshua Pereira



added much greater control over the type of shot taken. There are now two different buttons used to take shots, one for the wrist shot and the other is for a slap shot. This gives you much more control over the game and gives the shooting added depth. Deciding between the two becomes a major decision, as a wrist is accurate while the slapshot is much more powerful. The manual stick and tug hit button are still there and make the game that much more fun as you can undress the goalie as you put it in top shelf. The controls seem tighter this year, especially when turning as it appears that you can make your players stop on a dime if needed.

Goalies positioning in this year's edition have been improved ten fold. The A.I. is amazing with the goalies playing with excellent positioning and reading the plays and making mistakes exactly as you would expect from a NHL goalie.

An annoyance in the gameplay is the crazy amount of hitting that goes on. As soon as you step over the blue line on offence you will be taken down no matter who you are. My first season game as the Canucks I had Remmen going down the right wing and he was just smacked by Iglaia which seems pretty unrealistic. The amount of hits actually got annoying and you have to go into the options and turn down hitting to get a better game flow going. This is an annoyance that is fixable but should've been there in the first place.

The commentary is spectacular as usual which is expected of this series. Sound qualities have been much approved, especially the sounds off the ice. The sound of the puck hitting off the post actually sounds like the real thing. All the home crowds are authentic with their team cheers and the banners used in every stadium have also been replicated perfectly. One wish for next year's edition is more interactivity, like what is seen in ESPN NFL 2K5, where there are player interviews and such. That would really be a crowning jewel for this series.

All the modes from previous years are there i.e. season, exhibition, dynasty, which are standard now days. One new addition is the Free 4 All mode which has become a major party game. It's pretty much 2 - 4 people against one goalie trying to score as many goals as possible while stopping their opponents from doing the same. This leads to some great trash talking and there's nothing like a game with 4 people all tied 9 in a 10 goal game for suspense. It's a great addition to all the regular modes included and I'm sure will be hit with everyone that grabs it. The dynasty mode like last year has been beefed up with more options and stats, but has a few more annoyances that make it more work to see stats that should be easier to find, nothing major but still something to fix next year.

Over the last decade, hockey fans have gotten great hockey titles from EA, with improvements every year. The series had a few downfalls but has come back bigger and better than ever. The arcade-style of gaming may not please everyone but makes it a great game to get a few buddies over and just pass the time until the real hockey season gets under way. ■

With the hockey season on hold for an indefinite period of time, fans everywhere are starting to show symptoms of withdrawal. Without our national pastime of Hockey Night in Canada, Canadians seem to have a craving for our nation's favourite game. EA Sports however has stepped in to fill the void and has delivered what may be their best game of the long running series, with NHL 2005. From gameplay to controls to graphics, every aspect of the game has been notched up, making it a worthy purchase for those with a copy of NHL 2004, but it still falls short in certain places.

As soon as the game starts up you'll find that graphics have been boosted. The animations are silky smooth, whether it be the new shooting animations, the hits or even the stadium, and crowds look much more authentic. The player models in the game look much sharper and realistic and if you are an avid hockey fan you can easily pick out your favourite players.

The animations have increased quite a bit especially in their movements. Players now skate much more gracefully. They don't look like they are stiff robots that can only skate fast and slow, but rather glide along the ice with great precision, sharp turns and long cross ice sweeps. The goalie animations have also been stepped up, with more saves than ever before. One problem in the goalie animations is that when they're getting up from the ground they seem to just magically stand, without any transition. It's not a major issue but I caught it happening 3 or 4 times a game. Overall the graphics are solid and are great visuals, adding much more depth to the game.

The controls have changed in this year's version quite a bit, and have

Scamming You from Your Money

By Chris Chen

Fraud and scam artists have been around for what seems like forever. And in this new age of the Information Highway, they've adapted and sophisticated their ways of cheating you from your money. People's inboxes are now spammed regularly with numerous variations of fraudulent emails. Let's take a look at some of the more common scams and how to protect yourself from being taken.

Cashier's Cheque

You're selling a valuable item, such as a car, some jewellery, fancy electronics, or rare collectibles, through an online classified ad. A prospective buyer—often from Nigeria or West Africa—sends you an email offering to buy the item, no questions asked, and without questioning the item's working condition, quality, authenticity. They inform you a cashier's cheque has already been made out to you, but for a sum larger than you're asking for your item. Upon arrival, this eager buyer asks you to cash the cheque and return the excess amount via money transfer—only after the cheque clears, of course! You receive the fake (high-quality) cheque, your bank accepts it, and you wire the excess funds back to the buyer—after allowing enough time for the cheque to clear—and prepare to ship the item.

The transaction appears legitimate, and several days later when the bank informs you that the cashier's cheque was a fake, and you are instructed to return the entire value of the fake cheque.

Online Escrow Service

This scam often hits people buying cars or big-ticket items online. The victim buyer finds a car and a dealer who is willing to sell it at a great price and fast. But before the dealer will ship the car overseas, the buyer is asked to place their money into an escrow account at an online escrow company that the seller has provided. The buyer wires their money—at this point, the money is gone—but the seller never sends the car because the online escrow company was a fraudulent front created by the seller.

"There are hundreds of fake escrow services online," according to KIRO TV reporter Herb Weinstein.

Partial Payment Up-Front

The scamming seller offers a great deal on an item but will only trust the victim buyer if partial payment is sent first. Alternatively, the scammer sometimes convinces the victim by telling them the item has already been shipped, and that the victim should send payment immediately.

Protecting Yourself

There are several ways to save your money and avoid the grief and frustration of being cheated:

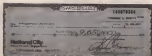


Figure 1 Sample of a fake cashier's cheque

- Be sceptical about offers that seem too good to be true; take notice of buyers that are more concerned about payment, as opposed to the quality, condition, or integrity of the item, be especially wary of overseas buyers that you don't know
- In the case of cashier's cheques, verify them by ensuring it contains all the legal elements of a valid cashier's cheque: amount in numbers matches the amount in words, account number is encoded in MICR ink (not shiny in appearance), perforations are on at least one side of the cheque; routing and transit numbers in the MICR line are consistent elsewhere on the cheque; no appearance of erasures, deletions, or alterations; authenticate the financial institution from which the cheque is drawn
- MSNBC technology correspondent Bob Sullivan suggests only using <http://www.escrow.com>, and ensure that you're dealing with the real escrow.com by typing their URL into your browser—not clicking on a link received through email.

Conclusion

Scammers are constantly and increasingly spamming people to find their next unsuspecting victims. The best defence against getting taken for a ride is ignoring any offer that seems too good to be true—avoid deals that fall into your lap. It just takes a little common sense to recognize a fraudulent deal.

Links

- Fake Escrow Sites Catching In: <http://www.komix.com/consumers/policy.asp?ID=30830>
- FTC — Law Enforcers Target "Top 10" Online Scams: <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2000/10/top10.htm>
- Dot Com: <http://www.wtix-gs/ftp/online/pubs/online/dotcom.htm>
- Online Scams Up, Credit Card Hacks Down: <http://www.primetime.com/co-news/article.php/2218571>

Chris Chen is a techno-writer who works as a technical writer in the software industry. ■

What's Black, Cool, Fits in Your Pocket and Holds Thousands of Songs?

The new portable MP3 player from MediaSonic!
Frontier Labs 1.8" 20GB Super Slim MP3 Juke Box

by Joshua Paul

For a long time I have wanted an iPod from Apple - but I haven't been able to justify spending \$429 for a 20GB hard drive that plays MP3 files - especially since hard drives are about \$1/GB. I know I am paying for style and size and convenient user interface but there are alot of other things I can buy for \$400 - or more accurately - I haven't been able to figure out how I can explain to my wife why I need a \$400 walkman.

But now I don't need to - for almost \$100 less I can get a 20GB walkman from MediaSonic - this is more reasonable! Not only do I get a small stylish 20GB MP3 player, I also get an FM radio built in - something the iPod doesn't include. The unit fits nicely in my pocket (the joystick for navigating menus however sometimes makes a selection by itself), the black and white screen is back lit and very readable, and the battery lasts 3 hours - perfect for listening to music on even the longest commute.

So how many songs can a 20GB drive hold? An MP3 of average length, encoded at an average bit rate will be about 3MBs - so in 1000MBs you can store about 333 songs - so in 20,000MBs (approx 20GBs) you can store 20 X 333, or 6660 songs - many more than you will you be able to listen to in the 3 hours the battery will last.

As good as this unit is there are a couple issues. For one, I can't just copy files to the unit - I must use their special file transfer program otherwise the MP3 files won't play. Also, when using the radio near fluorescent lights there is some noise. Finally, the menu interface is too cumbersome - it requires too many clicks to get to frequently used things.

Pros: 3 hour battery life, 20GBs of storage, built-in backlit screen, stylish design, small size, fm radio, low cost.

Cons: protruding joystick rubs in pocket and makes changes, proprietary program to copy MP3s, convoluted interface, fm radio noise from fluorescent lights.

Cost: street price approx \$329

Availability: please contact Wayne at 604-276-1619 for local dealers

For more info contact:

Wayne Chung

MediaSonic Enterprises Inc.

wayne.chung@mediasonic.ca

<http://www.mediasonic.ca/>



Aria Digital Music Juke Box M8270

By Sharon Rubin



I was recently asked by a very good friend of mine to review Aria's newest Digital Music Juke Box, the M8270. I am not the most technical person, but I love toys (yes, girls love to play with technical toys) and since I am a music freak, it must have seemed like a good fit. I have been using this jukebox all weekend and must say that I am impressed.

Aria has given the customer a lot to be impressed about. I quickly put 40 songs on the player and it used less than 1% of the memory (20GB in total). I can choose to listen to music or just relax to my favorite FM radio station. It also offers a sleep timer so I can fall asleep to music and not worry about wearing out the battery or turning it off. The menu was very easy to understand and intuitive. I can also record any string thoughts that come to me while I am waiting for my boyfriend to show up. The M8270 boasts an impressive 15 hours of music before the batteries need to be recharged. And finally, I can use the player as a portable hard drive storing files, pictures, my Outlook calendar and contacts and any notes I wish to keep track of.

But not all is sunshine and light. The earphone plug did not seem to fit properly and I sometimes had to juggle it to make a connection. The instructions are not very detailed, so if you have some technical issues, you may be out of luck. I was not able to find any additional information on the Aria website and since it is a UK based company I would be concerned about technical support if needed although I am sure that the importer or my local computer store would help me out in a pinch. And what about my music? Since there are no backup batteries, when the takes the player charging the will be limited to only a mere 15 hours of music before the batteries need to be recharged, a mere wink of the eye to a young manager.

But I guess the real question is, would I buy it? In my opinion... YES. It was a lot of fun, with lots of room for all my songs, an FM radio and easy to use and understand. And the price is great with a suggested retail of \$329.00.

Availability: please contact Wayne at 604-276-1619 for local dealers

For more info contact:

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